

To the Members of the California State Assembly:

I am signing Assembly Bill 2943 to prohibit the use of vaccines containing thimerosal for pregnant women and children under three years of age in California, effective July 1, 2006.

Used as a preservative, thimerosal is a mercury-based preservative compound that has been added to vaccines since the 1930s. Some have suggested a link between thimerosal in vaccines and autism. However, the most comprehensive reviews of scientific research to date from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Institute of Medicine conclude that there is no credible evidence linking thimerosal with autism or other neurodevelopmental disease in children.

While the best available evidence states that thimerosal is safe in the levels found in vaccines, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Public Health Service (PHS) and the AAP recommended in 1999 the removal of thimerosal from childhood vaccines. This recommendation reflects the importance of minimizing unnecessary exposure to mercury and maintaining public confidence in vaccine programs. Vaccine manufacturers agreed to this recommendation and since 2001, thimerosal has been removed in all routine pediatric vaccines.

I share the policy basis of the FDA, PHS and AAP 1999 recommendation. I believe that an abundance of caution merits the acceleration of the process already underway to remove thimerosal from the last few vaccines that contain it, as intended by AB 2943. Moreover, I believe AB 2943 includes an appropriate mechanism to ensure the availability of adequate vaccine supply in cases of emergency. I will direct the Health and Human Services Agency and the Department of Health Services to assess anticipated vaccine supply and demand in 2006-07 closely.

While I take this action in an abundance of caution, I want to encourage parents to get their children vaccinated. There are significant risks associated with the failure to vaccinate children which far outweigh any theoretical risk associated with thimerosal.

For these reasons I am signing this bill.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger